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AUTHOR Gerbner, George; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Trends in violence in television drama were measured from 1967 to 1976. In 1976, 89.1 percent of programming contained violent episodes, as opposed to 78.4 percent in 1975. The increase in violence was not due to changes in context of dramatic programming. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) contained the most violence overall in children's and late evening hours. The American Broadcasting Company (ABC) was middle in overall violence due to a decline in late evening violence and despite increases in family and children's hours. The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) held the lowest family, late evening, and overall violence scores. Persons most frequently victimized were children; old, unmarried, nonwhite or lower class women; and nonwhites. Children and adult viewer responses to questions about social reality confirmed previous findings that heavy exposure to violence in television drama may cultivate fear and mistrust. Tables showing trends of overall violence, violence for different viewing hours, and violence for each network from 1967 to 1976 are included. (KP)

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VIOLENCE PROFILE NO. 8

Trends in network television drama and viewer conceptions of social reality 1967-1976

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by

George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael F. Eleey
Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, Suzanne Jeffries-Fox,
and Nancy Signorielli

The Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia 19104

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Copies of this report including all Tables are available for $12.50 each (checks to be made payable to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania)

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HIGHLIGHTS OF TV VIOLENCE PROFILE NO. 8

(March 1977)

Television violence increased sharply in all categories including "family viewing" and children's program time on all three networks.

The increase resulted in the highest Violence Index on record. The only score that comes close to the current record of 203.6 was the score of 198.7 in 1967, the year of turmoil that led to the establishment of the Eisenhower Violence Commission and our TV Violence Index.

Other components of the TV Violence Profile confirmed previous findings of the unequal structure of power and risk in the world of television drama, and showed children's particular vulnerability to the effects of television. Heavy viewers revealed a significantly higher sense of personal risk, of law-enforcement, and of mistrust and suspicion than did light viewers in the same demographic groups, exposed to the same real risks of life. The results also showed that TV's independent contributions to the cultivation of these conceptions of a "mean world" and other aspects of social reality are not significantly altered by sex, age, education, income, newspaper reading, and church attendance.

The Violence Profile is a cluster of indices sensitive to different aspects of the nature and effects as well as the amount of violence on television. The Violence Index itself is a composite of measures of the prevalence, rate, and characterizations involved in violent action.

The latest Violence Index was based on the analysis of a fall 1976 sample of prime time, late evening, and weekend daytime network television dramatic

programming. The analysis focused on clear-cut and unambiguous physical expressions of overt violence in any context. (Available evidence suggests that violence in a humorous or fantasy context may be at least as effective a demonstration of some of its social lessons as "realistic" or "serious" violence.)

Figure 1 shows that the percentage of characters involved in violence and killing (CS) rose to the second highest, and the indicator of violent action in programs (PS) to the highest point on record. Three-fourths (74.9 percent) of all characters were involved in some violence compared to 65 percent in 1975. Nine out of every ten programs sampled (89.1 percent) contained some violence, compared to 78.4 percent in 1975. The saturation of programs with violence, indicated by the rate of violent episodes, rose to record heights of 6.2 per play and 9.5 per hour, compared to 5.6 and 8.1, respectively. Only killing declined slightly. The cumulative effect of the increases resulted in the unprecedented jump in the composite Violence Index. (The detailed figures and the precise composition of the Violence Index can be seen on Table 1 of the full report.)

The increase in violence cuts across program categories and times. The context of dramatic programming did not change significantly, eliminating the possibility that the upsurge of violence was due to a sudden jump in the number of action programs, or late evening, cartoon, new, or "serious" programs in the sample. (These figures can be seen in Tables A through F of the full report.)

All three networks increased their overall mix of violence but stayed in the same violence rank order as in 1975 with NBC the highest, ABC second, and CBS third. A network-by-network comparison shows the following rounded

Violence Index scores for 1975 and 1976:

	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	1975	1976	1975	1976	1975	1976
Overall index	187	207	155	181	201	224
"Family viewing" time (8-9 p.m. EST)	121	197	60	101	126	139
Late evening (9-11 p.m. EST)	232	196	176	175	224	282
Weekend (children's) hours (Sat. & Sun. daytime)	201	237	218	239	252	264

The 10-year trends are shown in Figures 2 through 7. Figure 2 gives the Violence Index for different hours of programming for all networks. Figure 3 presents the Violence Index for different hours of programming by each network. Figures 4 through 7 provide direct network comparisons separately for the overall Index, "family viewing time," late evening, and weekend (children's) programs.

As in 1975, NBC is the "leader" in overall violence and in both children's hours and late evening violence. ABC is in the middle in overall violence, due to a decline in late evening violence (in which it had been the highest before), and despite increases in "family viewing" and children's hours. CBS, leader in the "family viewing" concept, lifted its two-season lid on "family viewing time" violence, but still held the lowest "family viewing time," late evening, and overall violence scores. Children's hour violence on CBS rose to above that of ABC, but below that of NBC.

The Violence Index ranks CBS least and NBC most violent overall, CBS least and ABC most violent in "family viewing time," CBS least and NBC most violent in late evening, and ABC least and NBC most violent in weekend children's program time. (Detailed figures can be found in Tables 1 through 43 of the full report.)

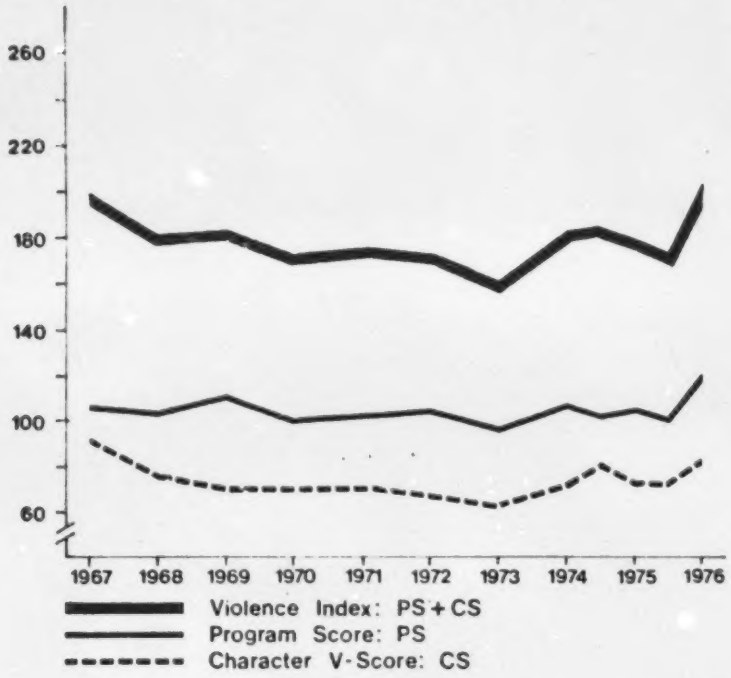

figure **1** Violence Index 1967-1976

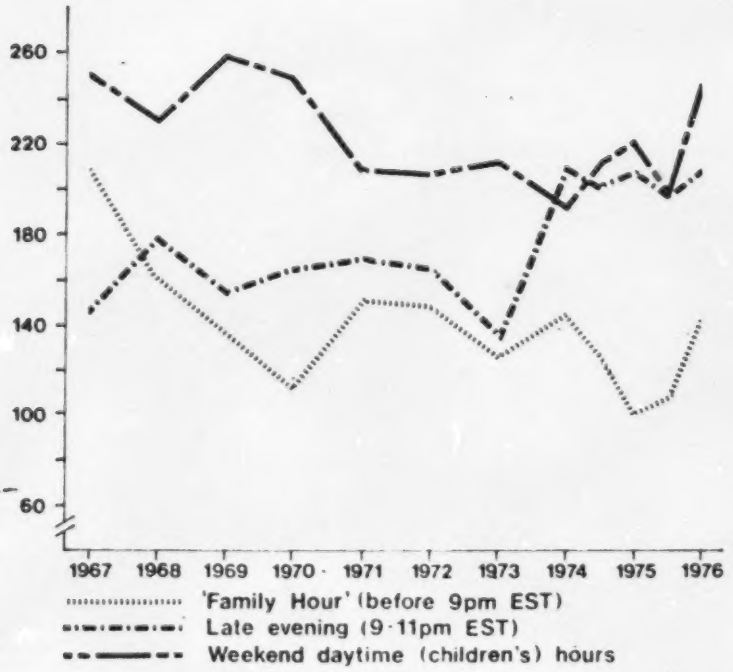

figure **2** Violence Index for different hours of dramatic programming

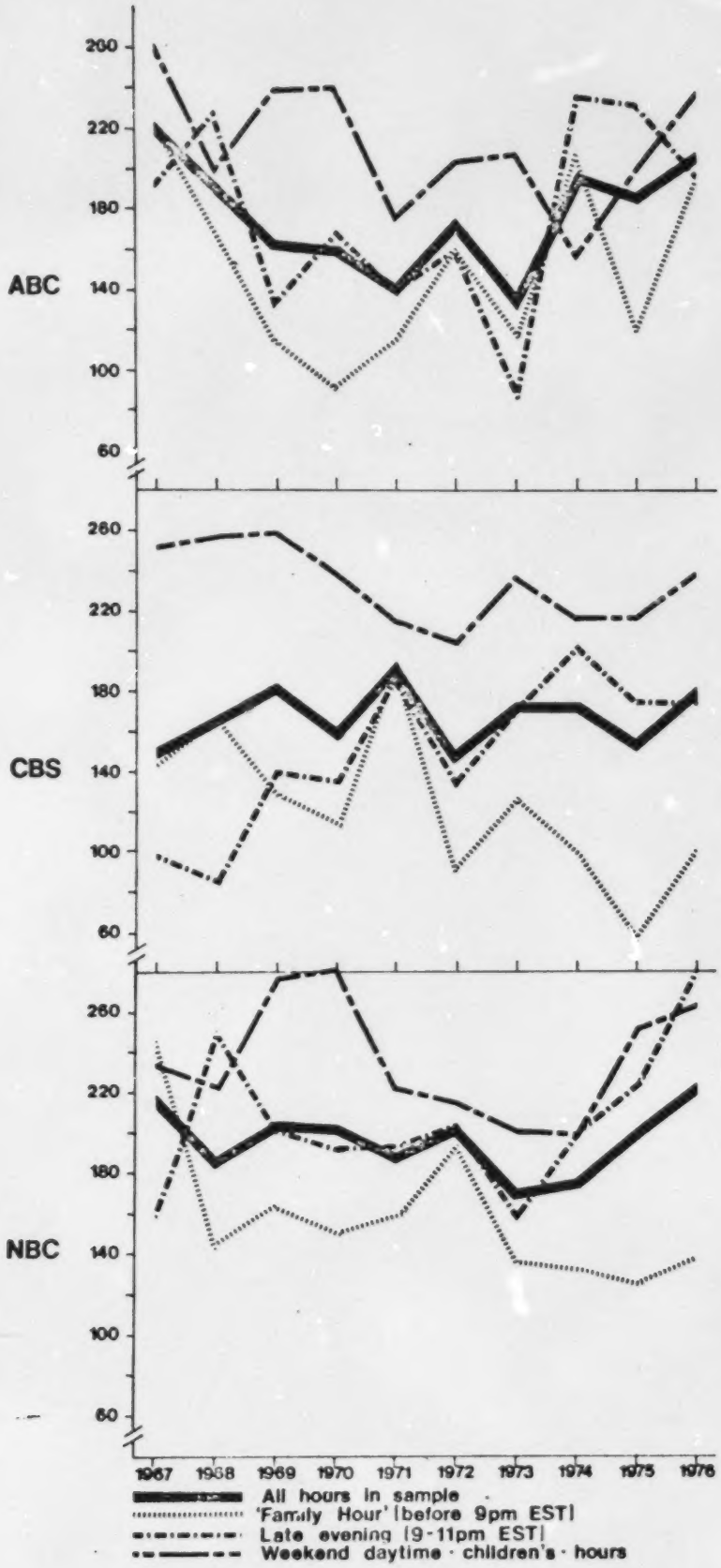

figure 3 Violence Index for different hours of programming by networks

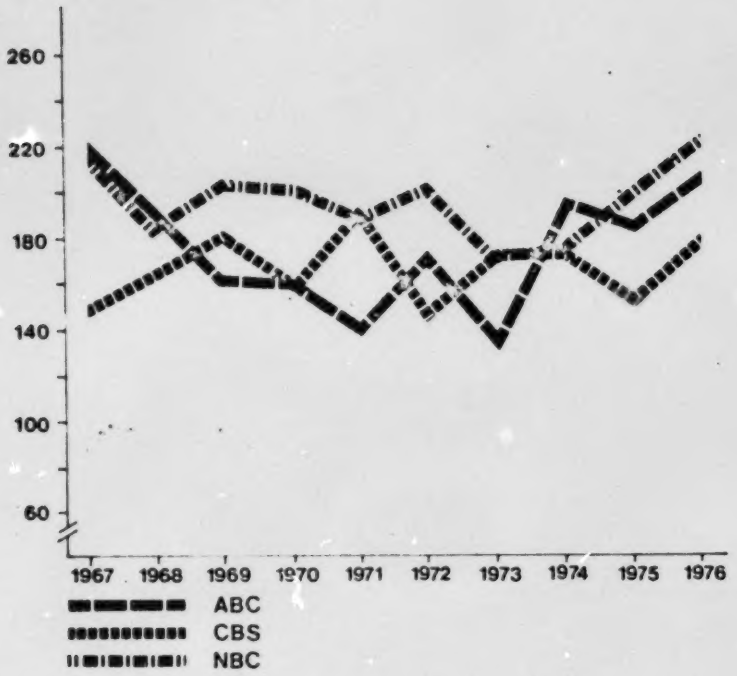

figure **4** Violence Index for each network, all programs in sample

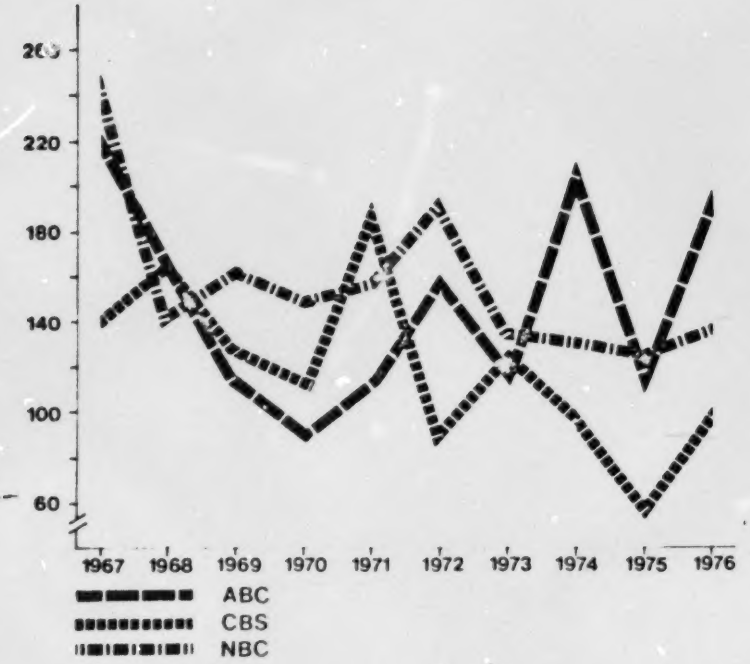

figure **5** Violence Index for each network, 'Family Hour' only

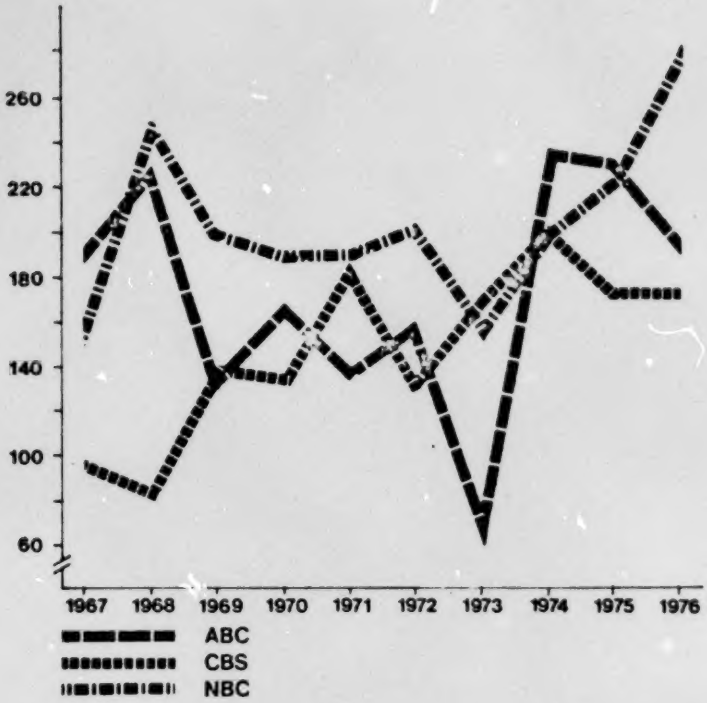

figure **6** Violence Index for each network, late evening only

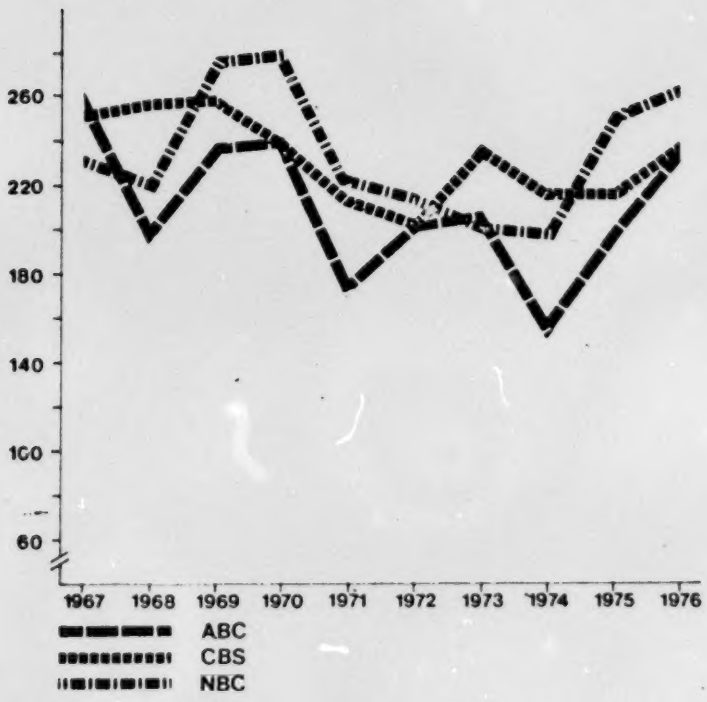

figure **7** Violence Index for each network, weekend daytime (children's) programs only

Other components of the Violence Profile deal with the structure of power demonstrated in TV violence and with conceptions of social reality that television viewing cultivates in the minds of viewers.

The most elementary -- and telling -- social structure involved in a violence scenario is that of violents and victims. The ratios of those who inflict and those who suffer violence provide a calculus of life's chances for different groups of people in the world of television drama. These Risk Ratios are obtained by dividing the more numerous of these two roles by the less numerous within each group. A plus sign indicates that there are more violents or killers than victims or killed and a minus sign indicates that there are more victims or killed than violents or killers.

The overall Violence-Victim Ratio since 1969 (when this measure was developed) is -1.21, meaning that for every violent there were 1.21 victims. However, while the overall victimization ratio for men is -1.20, for women it is higher: -1.32. Even more striking are the differential risks of fatal victimization. There were nearly two male killers for every male killed (Killer-Killed Ratio of +1.96). However, for every female killer, one woman was killed (K-K Ratio of 1.00).

Particularly high risks of victimization (relative to the ability to inflict violence) are borne by children (-1.73), old women (-3.00), unmarried women (-1.50), lower class women (-2.25), nonwhites (-1.40) and particularly nonwhite women (-2.50). "Good" characters were more likely to be victimized (-1.28) than "bad" characters (-1.02), although the latter were more often fatal victims. "Good" women were even more likely victims (-1.47) than "good" men (-1.24). But "bad" women had the most favorable (and only positive) Violent-Victim Ratio of all groups (+1.16). Committing

violence seems more likely to mark a female than a male character "bad" in the world of television.

Exceptionally high relative risks of fatal victimization are borne by the old and the poor, particularly among women. (Detailed findings can be found in Tables 44 through 64, with a summary in Table 65 of the full report.)

Although the pattern of relative victimization has been fairly stable from year to year, the overall Violent-Victim Ratio declined from -1.25 in 1975 to -1.06 in 1976, suggesting a possible decrease in overall victimization. However, the relative power positions of different sex, age, and social groups did not change.

The patterns of viewer responses to questions about social reality given by different groups of children and adults confirm previous findings that the cultivation of fear and mistrust may be among the most pervasive effects of heavy exposure to the violent and risky world of television drama. In giving the "television answer" to questions about violence, law enforcement, and trust, children tended to score higher and learn more from television than adults. Heavy viewers in all sex, age, education, income, reading, and church attendance groups were more imbued with the television view of a "mean world" than were light viewers in the same groups. (Detailed results can be seen in Tables 68-71 of the full report.)

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Violence Profile reports are cumulative. Each report incorporates the significant findings of and supersedes previous reports. Other publications relevant to this research are:

"Living with Television: The Violence Profile" by George Gerbner and Larry Gross, Journal of Communication, Spring 1976. (This article provides a description of the theoretical and methodological approach taken in this research and in the broader Cultural Indicators project from which these data are drawn. For copies of the Spring 1976 issue send $4.00 to the Journal of Communication, P.O. Box 13358, Philadelphia, PA 19101.)

"The Scary World of TV's Heavy Viewer" by George Gerbner and Larry Gross. Psychology Today, April 1976.

"The Real World of Television" by Larry Gross in the NEA Journal, January-February 1974.

"Scenario for Violence" by George Gerbner, Human Behavior, October 1975.

"Violene in Television Drama: Trends and Symbolic Functions" by George Gerbner in G. A. Comstock and E. A. Rubinstein (eds.) Television and Social Behavior. Vol. 1. Media Content and Control. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972.

"Dimensions of Violence in Television Drama" by George Gerbner, Chapter 15 in Violence and the Media edited by Robert K. Baker and Sandra J. Ball, a staff report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, U. S. Government Printing Office, 1969.

More general publications relevant to this research are:

Eli A. Rubinstein, "The TV Violence Report: What's Next?" Journal of Communication, Winter 1974; Douglass Cater and Stephen Strickland, TV Violence and the Child; The Evolution and Fate of the Surgeon General's Report. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1975; George Gerbner, "Toward Cultural Indicators: The Analysis of Mass Mediated Public Message Systems" in The Analysis of Communication Content: Developments in Scientific Theories and Computer Techniques, co-edited with Ole R. Holsti, Klaus Krippendorff, William J. Paisley and Philip J. Stone (Wiley & Sons, 1969); George Gerbner, "Cultural Indicators: The Case of Violence in Television Drama," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 388:69-81, March, 1970; George Gerbner, "Cultural Indicators: The Third Voice" in Communications Technology and Social Policy, co-edited with Larry Gross, and William H. Melody (Wiley & Sons, 1973); George Gerbner, "Communication and Social Environment," September 1972, Scientific American; George Comstock, Television and Human Behavior: The Key Studies, Rand Corporation, 1975.